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Lack of Contact Seen as Factor in S.African Race Problems

(Johannesburg) - Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, said here that the lack of sufficient "real human contact" between the various racial groups in South Africa has been a major contributing factor in the Union's race problems. (See EPS, No. 46)

The World Council executive said that the WCC-convened consultation on race relations of the WCC's eight member-churches in the Union "proves abundantly that effective solutions can be reached only through the meeting of minds", of all racial groups.

Dr. Visser 't Hooft made his remarks in an interview approximately mid-way through the consultation (December 7 - 14). All sessions have been closed to the press.

He said the multi-racial consultation substantiated his earlier observations that "the real challenge is to avoid frustration permeating the non-white groups in the Union resulting from lack of sufficient reasons for hope".

The implications of this situation, he added, are realized by participants in the consultation and "are being seriously grappled with by the church leaders of all confessions".

Earlier the WCC delegation in a cable to WCC headquarters in Geneva reported that sessions were marked with "frank speaking and a growing spirit of unity". The report said that there was "a deep unity of spirit, a determination to seek the guidance of the word of God and a seeking to understand those who differ in their interpretation".

It added that delegates gave "strong expression to widely divergent views, but found points of agreement" in discussions on the first agenda topic dealing with "a factual understanding" of the basic factors involved in the race relations situation.

Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, New York, chairman of the WCC's Central Committee and leader of its seven-man delegation, in an opening speech said of the consultation: "This is not a tribunal before which any individual or church is asked to give an accounting. Nor does the presence of the seven-man delegation of the World Council of Churches imply the slightest attempt at spiritual coercion."

"We come together as Christian brothers to face together one of the emergent issues of today - the question of race relations - and to do so in the light of the Gospel. Never will any church be forced to take a decision against its own convictions or desires. Ours is a united search. We all stand under the mandate of common truth."

He added: "The genius of the World Council and a consultation like this is that all of us are expected to speak from deep conviction, based on an honest effort to understand the Gospel. Each of us must listen to the other attentively and in a searching spirit and none must foreclose in advance the possibility of modifying his views. What we are doing here demonstrates the actuality of our faith today. It does not deal in abstractions, but boldly grapples with a stubborn, living problem of our generation."

EPS, Geneva.

Australian Anglicans Debate New Constitution

(Sydney) - Four Anglican clergymen, all members of the standing committee of the Synod of Sydney, have opposed proposed legislation to give the Church of England in Australia a new constitution and autonomy.

The signatories asserted that members of the present Church of England who declined to come into the proposed autonomous national church would be deprived of their churches and other religious property and would have no redress.

Contending that members "generally have not been consulted by any referendum or similar procedure", the plan's opponents claimed that the constitution would have the effect of "altering the character of the Church at the request of powerful sections of the Church, namely the Synods", and "would give property of the Church of England to this new Church".

Opposing the plan were the Rev. D. B. Knox, principal of Moore Theological College; the Rev. D. W. Robinson, vice-principal, and the Rev. J. R. L. Johnstone and the Rev. K. N. Shelley, both serving Sydney parishes.

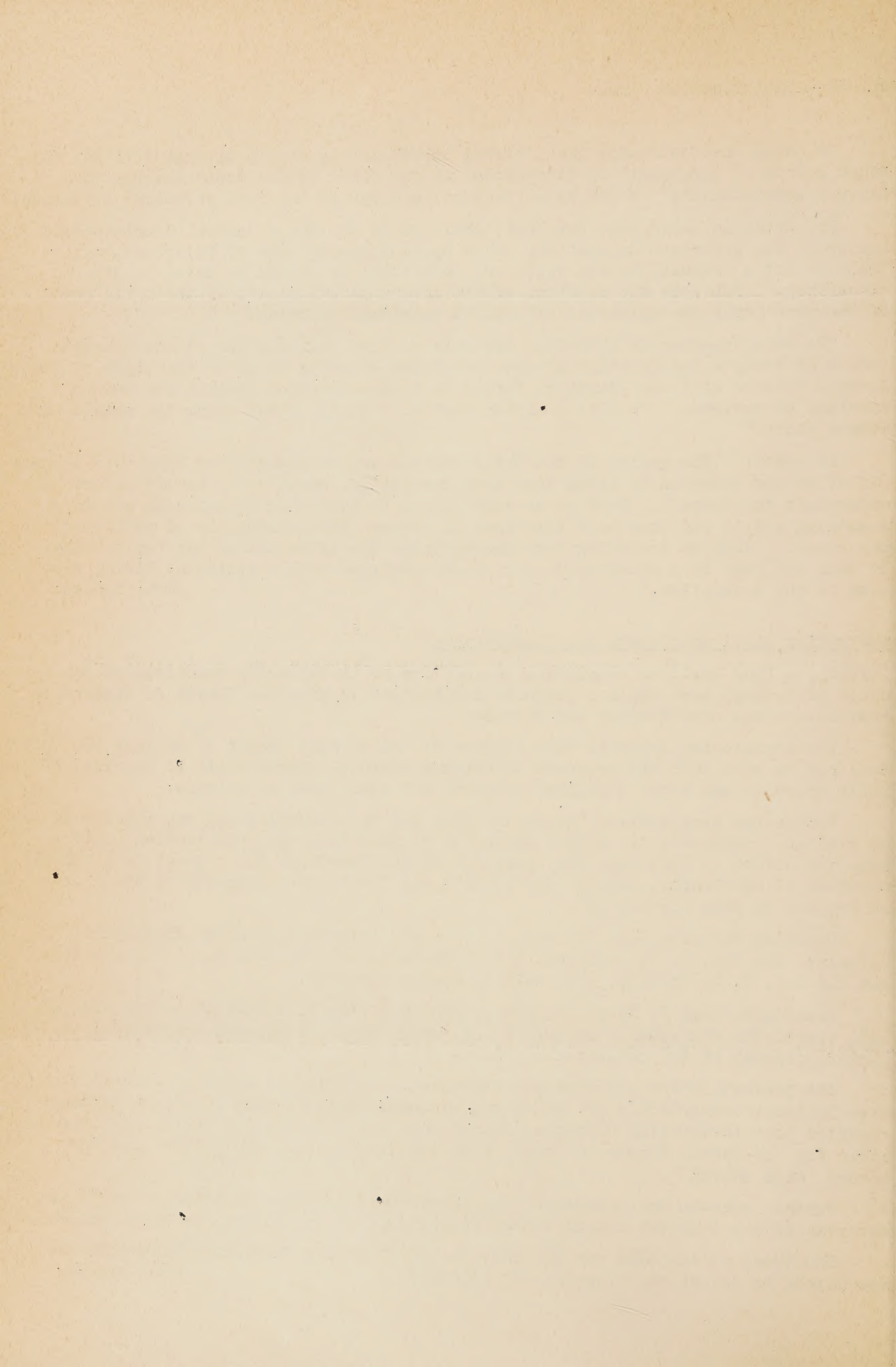
Archbishop Hugh R. Gough of Sydney, Anglican Primate of Australia, was said to have viewed the clergymen's statements as being "based on mis-interpretations of certain clauses in the constitution bill".

The protest letter reportedly represented a minority of about 50 members who were "extreme evangelicals" in the Synod, according to one observer. It was further reported that the opposing clergymen feared that the constitution would make it possible for the Sydney Diocese to "shift from its traditional evangelical role and become 'high church'".

Further concern was expressed that there would be some deviation of faith and doctrine if the Anglican Church became independent of the mother church in England.

The Synod of Adelaide was the only one of 25 synods throughout Australia and New Guinea to reject the proposal for autonomy.

EPS, Geneva.



Russian Orthodox Leader Supports Unity Moves

(Damascus) - Bishop Nikodim, head of the office of foreign church relations of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, said here that his church favours "any movement or gesture aimed at bringing about rapprochement or union among the various Christian churches".

However, he added, the Russian Church "does not consider that this aim can be achieved unless Pope John XXIII states in advance his agreement to deal with this matter on an equal footing with leaders of other Christian churches".

Bishop Nikodim, is one of 16 Russian church dignitaries accompanying Patriarch Alexis, 83-year-old head of the Russian Orthodox Church, on a month long tour of the Near and Middle East. He said he was speaking on behalf of the Patriarch.

Questioned by reporters about the Second Vatican (Ecumenical) Council called by Pope John XXIII, Bishop Nikodim said that no official invitation had been extended to the Orthodox Churches and thus it "cannot deal with the subject very effectively".

While in Damascus the Patriarch had talks with Patriarch Theodosios VII and other leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the Orient.

It was announced last week in Athens that the Patriarch and his entourage will visit Athens December 25 - 27 and will be received by the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece. It will be the first official visit by a Russian Orthodox primate to Athens in several centuries. EPS, Geneva.

Small, Dynamic Christian Witness Survives in Communist China

(Berlin) - A former German missionary to China has returned from a visit to the Communist mainland with the report that "one has to search for churches and Christians with a microscope" in most towns.

However, Gerda Buega, who joined a tour to China organized in East Berlin, did discover that the church is still comparatively active in Shanghai, even though the number of parishes there has dropped from 200 to 20 since the Communists came into power.

A Methodist minister informed her, she said, that all ministers in the city now meet regularly and that denominational differences no longer matter. Three services are held in his church each Sunday, and each is attended by some 300 persons.

In other towns, Frau Buega reported, only one Sunday service is generally conducted and seldom more than 60 persons are in attendance. While there were 65 churches in Peking in 1957, four congregations still meet regularly.

Writing in the Berlin missionary newspaper, Der Ruf, Frau Buega noted that she returned to the mainland after several years' absence "with the sincere desire to understand the people of the new China, both Christian and non-Christian". While there, she resumed contact with various Christian groups, visited a bishop of past acquaintance, and talked with several pastors.

Frau Buega confirmed earlier reports that pastors generally work in factories, some full-time. However, she disclosed that several Christians she met had responsible positions. In one province, Frau Buega said, some 50 Christians in various towns have been elected by the people as their representatives. But as "followers of Christ" they were tolerated as a minority group and had none of the status enjoyed by Communist Party members.

The wives of some ministers work as nurses while that of a bishop is employed in an envelope factory.

Noting that personal contacts had made it clear that church representatives were eager for an exchange of thought, Frau Buega concluded that "even my visit as a 'biased missionary' was welcome". EPS, Geneva.

Churches Challenged to Better Use of Television

(Chicago) - The churches have been urged to combine their resources to present the Gospel through mass media "in so appealing or challenging a form that it will begin to be a live issue to the millions of uncommitted people in our land".

The challenge was made at the semi-annual meeting of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago's Radio and Television Department by Mrs. Cynthia Wedel, a vice-president of the National Council of Churches and chairman of its Broadcasting and Film Commission, (USA).

Insisting that television is making a far greater impact on youngsters than religious education programmes, Mrs. Wedel remarked: "Faced with one of the mightiest forces of our day, the churches so far seem to be playing with it, with little sense of direction or purpose.

"We resolutely close our eyes to the fact that the values, opinions and beliefs of the American people, including church members, are to a very large extent being shaped today by the mass media."

"If our ideas of what is religious were not so narrow, we would be helping children, youths and adults to discuss and judge popular programmes on the basis of the views of human life they present, the values they uphold and the basic human questions they raise and answer," Mrs. Wedel added.

EPS, Geneva.

New Zealand Churches Study Merger Proposal

(Auckland) - Congregations of four New Zealand Protestant denominations are studying a draft statement of faith and a proposal for the union of their churches. The four bodies are the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches and the Associated Churches of Christ.

Plans call for individual parishes to report back to their respective denominational assemblies before the end of 1961 and for a referendum on the basis of union some time in 1962.

The main difficulty in the proposed union is expected to be the question of infant baptism. Three of the churches follow the practice, but the Associated Churches of Christ baptises only adults. The proposal under consideration states that each church should continue its present practice after union, and that a minister who has conscientious scruples against baptising infants can invite another clergyman to perform the ceremony.

EPS, Geneva.


Norwegian Bishops Oppose Nuclear Arms

(Oslo) - The Council of Bishops of the national Lutheran Church of Norway has called for an end to nuclear armaments and the safeguarding of peace through adequate international controls.

In a statement published in Oslo the bishops said that the existence of nuclear arms places too heavy a responsibility upon statesmen when confronted with the necessity of making far reaching decisions.

"The Church," the bishops declared, "cannot propound any particular view in any given political situation. Here the conscience of each individual must be decisive. But the Church will go on protesting against war as a means of settling controversies among nations. She will continue to appeal for the cessation of nuclear rearmament and for the safeguarding of peace through adequate international control."

EPS, Geneva.



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Government Official Defends Seizure of Paton's Passport

(Cape Town) - South Africa's Minister for External Affairs has expressed his approval of the seizure of the passport of Alan Paton, prize-winning author of "Cry, the Beloved Country", upon his return from abroad.

The official contended that Paton had attacked South Africa in remarks made abroad, and thereby in effect had aided its enemies. Expressing surprise that Paton had been granted permission to go to the United States, the minister noted that a passport is a privilege, not a right.

His remarks were made in an interview following a broadcast in which a commentator of the South African Broadcasting Company charged that Paton was "not a true patriot" because he allegedly was unreasonable in his criticism of the government while overseas.

Since the broadcast purports to be non-partisan, many condemned it because it appeared to favour the incumbent Government over the multi-racial Liberal Party of which Paton is president. However, the broadcasting company refused the well-known author time to reply to his critics.

Rejecting the view that he was "not a true patriot and wanted to see South Africa brought to her knees", Paton commented to reporters:

"On the contrary, I want to see South Africa rise from her knees, and in my opinion that can only be done by getting rid of the Nationalist Government. I certainly expressed the opinion while overseas that only external pressure would change the opinions of the white electorate, and I still believe that to be the case... The alternative to change is violence and conflict."

Paton's passport was seized at Johannesburg's Jan Smuts Airport on his arrival from London after an extensive trip to the United States and England. While in the United States, he was presented with the annual Freedom Award on behalf of his work for better race relations.

An outspoken critic of his government's apartheid policy, Paton viewed the passport seizure as "the penalty for speaking and writing the truth".

EPS, Geneva.

Germans Reject State Funds for Missions Programme

(Munich) - German Protestants have decided against accepting state funds for their "Brot für die Welt" campaign to relieve hunger and disease in distressed areas throughout the world.

Dr. Heinrich Riedel, president of the Evangelical Church's Social Council, told the press that the German Protestant Missionary Council feared that suspicion might easily arise that the work of the churches was a mere facade for "a new form of colonialism based on money", if the missions and church organizations collaborated with the state in assisting under-developed nations.

The German church leader was making reference to discussions in West German Government circles relative to the possibility of distributing part of the state funds for distressed areas through missionary societies.

The question was also discussed by the German Committee of the Lutheran World Federation at its meeting in Hanover on December 9.

Considering it contrary to the nature of missions to interfere in areas outside their own sphere, the LWF committee agreed that missions could not undertake assistance in education and training in state-supported programmes.

However, the committee observed that the question of church participation in influencing opinion about the human and moral aspects of aid to under-developed countries had not yet been settled.

The committee contended that it is the urgent task of the churches to stress the human factor in face of an over-emphasis upon the economic and political aspects of aid to under-developed areas. It further called upon the churches to arouse concern of technicians, businessmen and teachers to undertake work in such areas for the sake of humanity.

The committee discussed the question of financial support to younger churches to assist them in their work amid rapid social changes taking place in their countries, particularly in Africa and Asia. EPS, Geneva.

Bishop Reeves Suggests Probationary Period for South Africa

(London) - A two-year probationary period during which South Africa must change its racial policies if it wishes to remain within the British Commonwealth, has been suggested by the Rt. Rev. Ambrose Reeves, Bishop of Johannesburg, in a sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral, London.

Bishop Reeves, who was recently deported from South Africa, said the two-year period should be provided to give South Africa a chance "to show its good faith in this matter", and that "if South Africa refuses to accept this, then the responsibility for leaving the Commonwealth will lie with her government".

He added that it would be "easy" to conclude that the situation in South Africa is so terrible that the nation could no longer be tolerated in the Commonwealth.

The Anglican prelate said there was a double duty laid upon church people within the Commonwealth to see that the Commonwealth made plain its own attitude towards all racial discrimination and also to encourage efforts to hold the Commonwealth together.

Earlier the Bishop said it would be a grave mistake to assume that throughout Africa the African people ought to replace colonial rule with a reproduction of the British form of government. It might be that in some territories, he suggested, the next stage after colonial rule would have to be "some form of benevolent autocracy". EPS, Geneva.

Anglican and Roman Catholic Bishops Discuss "Meeting in Rome"

(London) - Implications of the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to Pope John XXIII were discussed by the Anglican Archbishop of York and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool last week in a radio interview presented by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Although both prelates welcomed the meeting their comments were marked by caution and careful courtesy.

Asked what they believed would be the meeting's contribution to unity, Roman Catholic Archbishop, Dr. John C. Heenan said: "It depends under God, upon you, upon your own attitude, upon abolishing narrowness, bigotry and intolerance".

The Anglican prelate, the Most Rev. A. M. Ramsey declared: "In future never speak about religious differences except in a spirit of love and charity." He urged that by "receiving Christ's gift and using it", listeners would be helping "unity in truth".

Archbishop Ramsey said that the meeting had "given tremendous public expression to something which has already long been warming up in the hearts of Christian people everywhere".

Dr. Heenan saw it as leading the way to practical co-operation in fields where Christians could agree. He added later that at this time in history "when for the first time you have whole nations united in hatred of God", this is the moment "to join together to resist those who would destroy religion". EPS, Geneva.

Muslim Paper Publishes Christian Testimonial

(Lagos, Nigeria) - The confession of faith of Eastern Nigeria's first African governor has been published in the country's largest newspaper by its Muslim editor. (See EPS, No.45)

The Times printed the testimony of Sir Francis A. Ibiam in connection with his installation to the top government post. His appointment was viewed in Nigerian church circles as evidence of religious freedom in the nation.

Sir Francis' confession stated that he accepted as "the absolute truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God, and that for my sake He died".

"Jesus Christ never fails in His promises," the new governor continued. "The Lord has made it possible for me to discharge many and heavy responsibilities which fall to the lot of people in my station in life,"
EPS, Geneva.

In Brief

An atheist film club has been started in Szeged in the south of Hungary as a new form of anti-religious propaganda. Housed in the same building as the Communist Youth Party, the club precedes the film presentations by lectures on such anti-religious topics as "The Origin of Superstition" and "The Trail of Witches in Szeged".

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The Catholic press has reported the establishment of a new Cistercian monastery in Kerala to be used as a mission and prayer centre for re-uniting the Mar Thoma Christians with the Roman communion. During the last 30 years, the reports say, 100,000 Christians in Kerala have "returned" to the Roman Church as a result of active missionary endeavours.

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The special Synod of the Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine, which met recently in Strasbourg, has taken a step toward "organic unity" with the French Reformed Church. The Synod voted to adapt its programmes to those of the other body, and will send a larger delegation of pastors and laymen to the FRC synods. Voting rights will be sought and motions carried by the French Reformed Church would apply within the Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine.

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Pastor Tulio Vinay, founder and leader of Agape, world-famous ecumenical youth centre in northern Italy, is resigning from the centre staff to investigate plans for starting a second centre at Riesi, in Sicily. Before beginning work on the proposed second centre he will visit the United States for two months on the invitation of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, which has supported Agape since its foundation. Pastor Vinay will be succeeded as director of Agape by Pastor Giorgio Girardet, formerly pastor of a Waldensian church in Trieste, who has been working at Agape, since mid-summer.

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For the first time an African has been elected head of the 115,000 member Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church of South-West Africa. He is the Rev. Leonard Aualao, 53-year old supervisor of parishes and for the past two years the church's vice-moderator. He succeeds a Finnish missionary, the Rev. Alpo Hukka. The church, started 90 years ago by Finnish missionaries, was constituted as an autonomous church in 1956.

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A special press office will be created at the Vatican to keep the public informed of preparations for the forthcoming Second Vatican (Ecumenical) Council. A Vatican announcement said one of the main tasks of the office would be to prevent the spreading of false information about the preparations.

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Special Report

Views on US Merger Proposal

(San Francisco) - A proposal to merge four major American Protestant denominations into a communion of close to 20,000,000 members has been greeted by many church leaders as one of the most significant developments in modern Protestantism. (See EPS No. 46)

The proposal was made last week by Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, stated clerk of the United Presbyterian Church, in a sermon held in connection with the triennial general assembly of the National Council of Churches. The six-day assembly was marked by repeated pleas for unity by leaders of member denominations.

Under the Blake proposal, a united communion of 18,225,000 members would be formed out of the merger of the Methodist Church with 10,000,000 members, the Protestant Episcopal and the United Presbyterian with 3,000,000 each, and the United Church of Christ with 2,225,000 communicants.

Some leaders of both the Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ joined Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike of California, in reacting favourably to the proposal.

Methodist Bishop John Wesley Lord of the Washington, D. C. Area, viewed Dr. Blake's recommendation "for a united and simplified Church of Christ" as one of historic significance. "If carried out this proposal would release millions of dollars annually for humanitarian and world service agencies," he remarked.

Viewing Dr. Blake's reasons as "compelling and firm", the Methodist prelate commented that denominations can be "complacent, parochial and proud," and "too little concerned for the values, traditions and achievements of groups other than their own". He said the merger plan "conserves and strengthens all that is worthy in the reformed and catholic traditions and eliminates the extraneous and unholy elements that have crept in during our years of living apart".

Bishop Lord said further that the proposal "shatters our ecclesiastical pretenses and demonstrates our inherent strengths".

Noting that Dr. Blake found justification for his proposal in the merger of younger communions in South and North India, Pakistan and Ceylon, the Methodist leader candidly remarked: "The church in its parent body now looks to the example set by its children."

Meanwhile, Dr. Fred Hoskins and Dr. James E. Wagner, co-presidents of the United Church of Christ, promised that if such a joint invitation for discussions of merger were issued "it would be given most thoughtful consideration by the General Synod of the United Church of Christ".

In a joint statement, the United Church officials cautioned that such a proposal could not become a reality overnight. While giving assurance that their denomination seeks to be "not only a united but a uniting church", they pointed out that at least four years would be required before all four national denominational bodies involved will have been able to take the basic authorizing actions.

They expressed regret that the proposal was directed to four denominations, since the United Church is currently involved in preliminary talks aimed at the eventual merger with the Disciples of Christ. They suggested that the plan be enlarged to include the Disciples before it is "implemented further".

However, the Hoskins-Wagner statement noted that US churches are indebted to Bishop Pike and Dr. Blake "for launching these proposals which by their very boldness warrant the grateful consideration of all".

A somewhat cooler reaction to the plan was voiced by Charles P. Taft, prominent Episcopal layman, who objected that it failed to "leave room for the pluralism of the Protestant churches". He expressed concern that the proposal may be opposed by the laity, and questioned whether "structural or organic union is the proper solution".

Supporting Mr. Taft's position of "unity in diversity", Methodist Bishop Gerald Kennedy of Los Angeles noted that "there are a large number of churchmen who are committed to closer co-operation but are not at all enthusiastic about organic union that would make a Protestant church top heavy with administration and machinery.

Presiding Bishop Arthur Lichtenberger of the Episcopal Church called for careful study of the proposal. Noting that for more than 12 years the Episcopal and Methodist communions have been engaged in discussions relative to merger, Bishop Lichtenberger said Dr. Blake's plan "provides the possibility of enlarging these conversations to include churches of other traditions".

"One of the most important features of the plan... is that it would not only provide for full intercommunion between the churches... but would unite them organically," he noted. "This union would not mean a monolithic and authoritarian structure but a structure in which both catholic and reformed traditions would be united."

The newly-elected NCC president, J. Irwin Miller, an Indiana industrialist, informed the press that "there now exists a climate in nearly all denominations that permits executives and leaders of the churches to express themselves in terms of merger and unity".

Urging Christians not to think of unity in "administrative terms", Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, London, general secretary of the International Missionary Council, insisted that unless the Church goes "back to our Lord Himself we can withdraw into our own box and produce such a hum of ecclesiastical machinery" that nothing else can be heard.

(Comment on the Blake proposal was also forthcoming from a noted Roman Catholic source. The Rev. Edward Duff, S.J., editor of Social Order magazine and author of "Social Thought of the World Council of Churches", predicted that such a proposal would eventually be adopted by American Protestantism.

Father Duff noted that the ecumenical movement, and Catholic hopes as well, are furthered because churchmen realize that "division represents a scandal - and even a sin - since Christ said that He wanted unity... that He established one Church".

No longer is the Catholic attitude toward the ecumenical movement one of "aloofness", Father Duff said. He attributed this fact to the "threat of Communist imperialism" and the "warm, charitable personality of Pope John XXIII".

While seeing little hope for formal Catholic-Protestant unity in the foreseeable future, Father Duff said the Secretariat for Christian Unity of the forthcoming Second Vatican (Ecumenical) Council will interpret results of the Rome gathering to the World Council of Churches. He predicted that the secretariat would become permanent after the Vatican sessions end.)

In other actions the NCC assembly: 1) elected Mr. Miller as its first lay president in its 10-year history, succeeding Dr. Edwin T. Dahlberg, a Baptist minister from St. Louis, Mo; 2) unanimously resolved that Christians should vigorously support efforts to strengthen the United Nations even though the United States may soon find itself outvoted in the international organization; 3) adopted a pronouncement calling for modification of Federal-State aid to dependent children to include illegitimate children. It also asked for elimination of the present requirement that fathers be absent from the home before mothers and children are eligible for aid.

EPS, Geneva.